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ABSTRACT

This study describes the influence of social desirability on Rokeach Dogmatism scores and demonstrates how misleading self-report inventories can be. Dogmatism instruments with instructions suggesting either that commitment or control of personal beliefs is desirable were randomly distributed to 20 anonymous elementary teachers before a workshop on values clarification. After the workshop, the instrument was readministered without set-inducing instructions. Differences in instructions produced the expected differences in preworkshop dogmatism scores. There was not change from pre- to posttest within treatments. Posttest scores still differed between groups. Clearly, teachers adapted responses to conform to perceived desirability. (Author)

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Degmatism and Social Desirability:

How to Change "Personality" in Two Easy Sentences

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This study describes the influence of social desirability on Rekeach Degmatism scores, and demonstrates how misleading self-report inventories can be. Degmatism instruments with instructions suggesting either that commitment or control of personal beliefs is desirable were randomly distributed to twenty anonymous elementary teachers before a workshop on values clarification. After the workshop, the instrument was readministered without sat-inducing instructions. Differences in instructions produced the expected differences in pre-workshop degmatism scores. There was no change from pre to post test within treatments. Post test scores still differed between groups. Clearly, teachers adapted responses to conform to perceived desirability.

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**Dogmatism and Social Desirability:
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Objectives

The purpose of this study is to describe the influence of the variable of social desirability on a personality measure commonly used in social studies research, and to demonstrate how misleading conclusions based upon self-report instruments can be. Specifically, we propose to demonstrate that scores on the Rekeach Dogmatism Scale can be manipulated by the respondent according to perceived desirability of outcomes and, consequently, that "low dogmatism" scores may reflect such diverse traits as knowledge of social norms or conformity.

Perspectives

The use of various self-report instruments of teacher attitudes and personality characteristics is common in research on social studies. Self-report instruments are useful in some contexts as long as the researcher does not confuse the operational measurement too closely with the theoretical construct he is attempting to measure. However, research based upon self-report data can be seriously misleading when conclusions treat responses as real opinions or personality characteristics with no consideration of the possibility of socially conditioned response sets.

For example, opinionnaires on the desirability of mini-course curricula, values clarification or various features of the new social studies may be quite interesting in the sense of determining the degree of exposure of the innovation, describing objections to it, or in describing changes in acceptance over time. But when the instrument is preceded by the enthusiastic propaganda typical of our field, the use of opinionnaires in judging real opinions or real worth of the innovation is hopelessly confounded by socially desirable response sets. Similarly, the use of personality inventories in describing characteristics of good and bad teachers may be appropriate in determining what respondents think they should say; but such self report inventories may not reflect the characteristics named in the test title in any real sense. (Edwards, 1964) Indeed, the instrument may reflect characteristics quite different from the supposed traits.

We believe the effects of social desirability are often neglected or ignored in research on social studies teachers, and that a significant contribution to the quality of future research would accrue from testing the hypothesis that teachers can and do adapt their responses on a popular self-report inventory to conform to what they perceive the researchers to regard as desirable. Confirmation of this hypothesis might stimulate reinterpretation of earlier research, provide information for the selection and interpretation of self-report inventories, and improve designs of future studies.

Method

Twenty in-service elementary teachers attending a workshop on values clarification served as the subjects of this study. The experimenter was employed as the outside consultant to conduct the workshop.

Immediately after he was introduced, the experimenter explained that the first activity would be for participants to fill out an attitude inventory to help them become aware of their personal beliefs. Participants were told to make up some personal identification number known only to themselves and to write this code at the top of the inventory when it was received. Otherwise, participants were told only to read the instructions and begin working as seen as the inventory was distributed. Untitled copies of the Re-keach Dogmatism Scale were then distributed by the experimenter in a manner which suggested that there were no differences between copies of the inventory.

In fact, the instructions inserted at the beginning of the inventory did differ in two sentences which implied two very different kinds of desirable responses. Half of the instruments included the statement that effective value clarifiers are individuals with clear values and commitments of their own, and a second sentence explaining that the instrument was to help them become conscious of their own feelings. The other half of the instruments included instructions which explained that effective value clarifiers are individuals who can control their own beliefs in discussing values with children and a second sentence explaining that the instrument was to help them become conscious of their own values. The two kinds of instruments appeared to be the same at a glance and were stacked randomly to insure random distribution. In effect, random distribution of instruments constituted random assignment to treatment groups.

Papers were collected as they were completed, and the rest of the inservice meeting was conducted on the Rathas/Simon approach to values clarification. In brief, teachers were told essentially that the clarifier should have clear values and model commitment, but clarification discussions should be open-ended and student values should be accepted in a supportive but non-judgmental manner. Some examples and techniques were demonstrated.

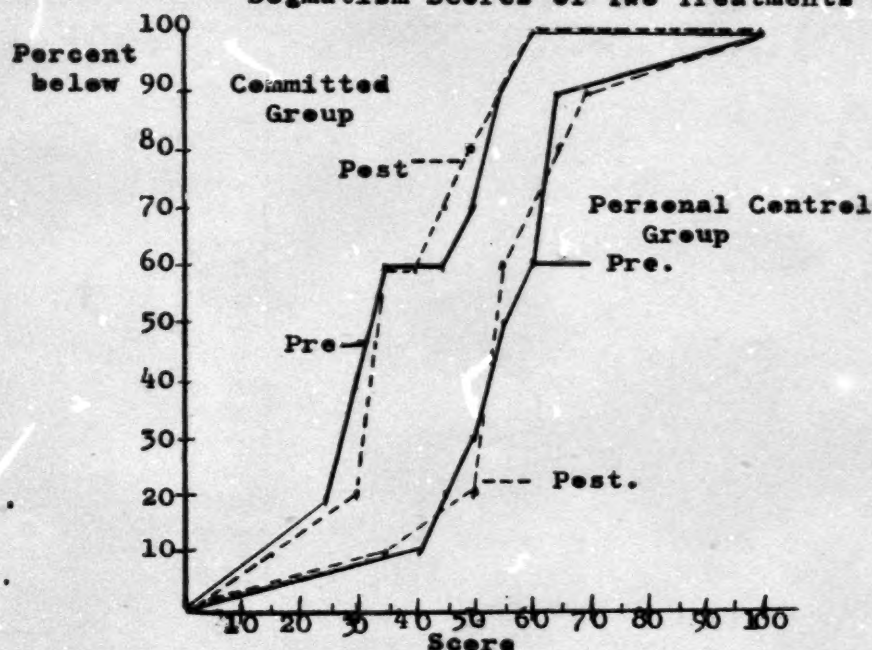
After the workshop, teachers were again asked to fill out a second copy of the Dogmatism Scale, using the same I.D. number. This time, however, there were no instructions provided that would bias responses.

Dogmatism scores were compared between treatment groups on the initial test scores. Post instruction test scores were compared within and between treatment groups. The non-parametric Kolmergerov-Smirnov statistic was used for each of the three comparisons.

Results

The distribution of scores for pre and post tests are represented in figure 1. In sum, subjects who were told that commitment was desirable in pretest instructions produced scores that were significantly more "dogmatic" than subjects who were told that good clarifiers could control their own opinions. There were no significant differences when pre and post workshop scores were compared within treatment groups. Between group comparisons on post test scores indicated a sustained difference in "dogmatism" between treatments.

Cumulative Frequency Polygons
Dogmatism Scores of Two Treatments on Two Tests



$$\begin{aligned}
 \chi^2 &= \frac{4D^2 (n_1 n_2)}{n_1 + n_2} \\
 &= \frac{4(.60)^2 (100)}{10 + 10} \\
 &= 7.2 > \chi^2_{2df, \alpha .05}
 \end{aligned}$$

Significance

The results of this study indicate rather clearly that teachers can and do adapt responses on the Dogmatism Scale according to perceptions of the type of response that is "desirable", and that this adaptation is reasonably stable.

It is significant to note that subjects were not told how to respond in any direct or explicit sense, and that the anonymity of each respondent was assured. The mere suggestion that one or another type of response was clearly acceptable was sufficient to produce a stable response set. These conditions exist in any self-report study where opinions on current trends are requested, and would be magnified if the name of the respondent was not clearly dissociated with the responses.

This study extends earlier findings of effects of social desirability to a new instrument popular in social studies research. It gives cause to reinterpret earlier research...the subjects in this study demonstrated conformity to a perceived ideal of the experimenter in both treatments quite as clearly as dogmatism. More important, it suggests by extension that other self-report inventories should be used in such a way that findings are meaningful even if respondents guess at socially desirable responses.